

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently amended) A method of preparing samples for analysis, comprising:

injecting ~~at least one~~ a liquid in ~~individual~~ a column of a plurality of columns of a movable plate located at a first position ~~by means of at least one~~ using a movable injection needle; ~~[[and]]~~

~~moving~~ displacing said the movable plate between at least two operational positions from the first position to a second position by displacing said at least one ~~coupling the movable injection needle while said at least one needle is in a relationship of at least indirect mutual engagement with~~ [[said]] the movable plate and moving the movable injection needle;

~~characterized by said mutual engagement being performed between said needles and engagement formations outside said columns~~

injecting a second liquid in the column of the movable plate located at the second position using the movable injection needle while the plurality of columns are open to the atmosphere;

after injecting the second liquid, moving the movable plate downwards into sealing engagement with an underlying receptacle;

after sealing, subjecting the underlying receptacle to a vacuum;

drawing liquid from all of the plurality of columns into the underlying receptacle through a stationary phase provided in each column; and

releasing the vacuum from the underlying receptacle.

2. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 1, ~~characterized in that said mutual engagement is realized between a tip of said needle and a recess which is in driving relationship with said plate wherein the movable injection needle and the movable plate are coupled by inserting the movable injection needle into a first recess coupled to the movable plate, wherein the first recess is offset from the plurality of columns.~~

3. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 1, ~~characterized in that for different movements of said plate, said mutual engagement is performed at different locations with respect to the plate wherein the movable injection needle is coupled to the movable plate at a first location for movement from the first position to the second position and at a second location, different from the first location, for movement from the second position to the first position.~~

4. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 2, ~~characterized in that for different movements of said plate, said mutual engagement is performed between said tip and different recesses, respectively wherein the movable injection needle is inserted in a second recess coupled to the movable plate for movement from the second position to the first position.~~

5. (Currently amended) A method according to claim [[3]] 1, ~~characterized in that said mutual engagement is performed between said needle and wherein the movable injection needle and the movable plate are coupled at a carriage supporting said movable plate, and the method further comprises causing the carriage to slide horizontally from one to the other of two underlying receptacles.~~

6. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 5, ~~characterized by said mutual engagement being performed along wherein the movable injection needle and the movable plate are coupled at an edge of [[said]] the carriage which is transverse to a sliding direction of [[said]] the carriage.~~

7. (Currently amended) A method according to claim [[3]] 8, ~~characterized in that said displacing is performed to cause a downward displacement of the plate against biasing springs, said mutual engagement is performed between a tip of said needle and wherein the movable injection needle and the movable plate are coupled at a pusher plate mounted to the movable plate to provide the downwards movement lowering means, and said needle is moved axially downwards to urge said plate lowering means downwardly.~~

8. (Currently amended) A method according to claim [[7]] 1, ~~characterized in that said mutual engagement is performed outside apertures which are provided through said plate lowering means in registration with some of said columns wherein the movable~~

injection needle and the movable plate are coupled at a flange to provide the movement from the first position to a second position.

9. (Canceled)

10. (Canceled)

11. (Currently amended) A method according to claim [[10]] 1, characterized in that [[said]] the underlying receptacle is a collect receptacle having wells respectively corresponding to each column of the plurality of columns.

12. (Currently amended) A method according to claim [[10]] 1, ~~characterized in that said receptacle is wherein in the first position, the movable plate is positioned above a drain receptacle, and wherein after release of said vacuum, said plate is moved to a position above a collect receptacle, and the steps of injecting a liquid, displacing the plate downwards into sealing engagement, drawing liquid from all said columns simultaneously and releasing said vacuum are reiterated above and in conjunction with said collect receptacle.~~

13. (Currently amended) A method according to claim [[10]] 12, ~~characterized in that at least one displacement of said plate is performed by bringing an injection needle into an at least indirect engagement with said plate and displacing said injection needle so as to drive said plate in said one displacement further comprising, after injecting the liquid and before moving the movable plate to the second position, moving the movable plate downwards into sealing engagement with the drain receptacle;~~

after sealing with the drain receptacle, subjecting the drain receptacle to the vacuum;

drawing liquid from all of the plurality of columns into the drain receptacle through the stationary phase provided in each column; and

releasing the vacuum from the drain receptacle.

14. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 13, ~~characterized in that~~ said engagement occurs between said needle and a carriage supporting said plate, for a horizontal displacement of said plate wherein the movable injection needle and the movable plate are coupled at a pusher plate mounted to the movable plate to provide the downwards movement.

15. (Currently amended) A method according to claim [[13]] 14, characterized in that ~~said engagement occurs between said needle and a plate-lowering means which is mounted above said plate wherein the pusher plate comprises a first recess offset from the plurality of columns, and further wherein the movable injection needle and the movable plate are coupled by inserting the movable injection needle into the first recess.~~

16. (Currently amended) A method according to claim [[15]] 13, characterized in that ~~injecting liquid comprises liquid injection through apertures which are provided through said plate-lowering means in registration with some of the columns wherein the movable injection needle and the movable plate are coupled at a flange to provide the movement from the first position to the second position.~~

17. (Withdrawn) A rack for preparing samples for analysis, comprising:

- a frame;

- a sliding assembly which is mounted for sliding in the frame and is provided with a plate having a plurality of columns for receiving samples through an upper opening of said columns;

- a first and a second receptacle mounted in the frame underneath the sliding assembly; and

- means for selectively connecting each said receptacle with a vacuum source; said sliding assembly being movable between a first position above said first receptacle and a second position above said second receptacle, characterized by said sliding assembly being provided with engagement means for a needle, said engagement means being located outside said columns.

18. (Withdrawn) A rack according to claim 17, characterized in that said sliding assembly comprises a carriage removably supporting said plate, and said engagement means are provided on said carriage.

19. (Withdrawn) A rack according to claim 18, characterized in that said carriage comprises a body having an upper edge extending along at least part of the periphery of the plate, and at least part of said engagement means is provided on said upper edge.

20. (Withdrawn) A rack according to claim 19, characterized in that said engagement means comprise a row of recesses along a transverse edge belonging to said upper edge and extending transversely to the sliding direction of the carriage.

21. (Withdrawn) A rack according to claim 18, characterized in that said carriage comprises a body in which said plate is mounted for limited downward movement against biasing springs, and a pusher element which is mounted for vertical movement in abutment above said plate and is provided with at least part of said engagement means.

22. (Withdrawn) A rack according to claim 21, characterized in that said pusher element is provided with apertures which register with some of said columns underlying said pusher element.

23. (Withdrawn) A rack according to claim 21, characterized in that said pusher element extends along a median line of the plate.

24. (Withdrawn) A rack according to claim 18, characterized by being adapted to be assembled by successive stacking of parts and to be disassembled by successively stacking off said parts thereby to allow quick extraction of used receptacles and plate, and quick insertion of new receptacles and plate.

25. (Withdrawn) A device for preparing samples for analysis comprising:

- a rack according to claim 17; and
- an injection unit comprising:

- i. an injection head provided with at least one injection needle;
- ii. an actuator for three-dimensional displacement of said injection head;
- iii. control means for controlling said actuator whereby said head is successively brought in injection positions in which the needle registers with columns of said plate, and in plate-drive positions in which said needle registers with said engagement formations and then drives said plate for a predetermined displacement.